

# Online Product Ratings in Context—How Contextual Rating Information Affects Consumers' Product Beliefs and Preferences

**Julia Reinhard**  
University of Cologne  
**Hernán Bruno**  
University of Cologne

Cite as:

Reinhard Julia, Bruno Hernán (2019), Online Product Ratings in Context—How Contextual Rating Information Affects Consumers' Product Beliefs and Preferences. *Proceedings of the European Marketing Academy*, 48th, (9476)

Paper presented at the 48th Annual EMAC Conference, Hamburg, May 24-27, 2019.



# Online Product Ratings in Context—How Contextual Rating Information Affects Consumers' Product Beliefs and Preferences

## **Abstract**

Previous research established a substantial effect of online product ratings on sales. However, consumers do not view ratings in isolation but make decisions in a rating context composed of multiple options from similar or different categories and brands. While there is some research on trade-offs consumers make when comparing two products, we know little about information integration in such broader contexts. Hence, this paper investigates how and when contextual rating information influences consumer behavior. Three studies show that consumers form beliefs about a focal product by integrating their prior and contextual rating information with its current rating and thereby pay attention to small sample sizes. While positive contextual rating information from products of the same brand always enhances product beliefs, its effect on product preference depends on context composition. It reduces product preference but increases it when also competitor products from other brands are included in the rating context.

**Keywords:** *Online Product Ratings; Choice in Context; Information Integration*

**Track:** Digital Marketing & Social Media